

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT
May 13, 2004

I want to welcome everyone here today to discuss an issue that has been of continuing interest to this committee, high-performance computing.

I became interested in this issue back in the early '80s, in the first years I served on this committee, when Ken Wilson, a Nobel laureate in physics who was then at Cornell, testified that his students sometimes had to go overseas to get access to the fastest computers.

Prompted by those concerns, and by concerns about the health of the U.S. computing industry, this committee helped provide the impetus for the National Science Foundation (NSF) supercomputer center program, which I think everyone here would agree has been a resounding success.

Indeed, spawned in part by those centers, there has been a supercomputing revolution in this country. High-performance computing has become an everyday part of scientific research in both academia and industry; computation has become a third way of pursuing scientific questions, along with theory and experimentation.

And while the computing industry doesn't look much like it did in the early '80s revolutions often leave bodies in their wake—U.S. computing capability has continued to advance, and we often hear that today's desktop computers have the power that was once limited to the highest-end models.

But we can't take that success for granted, and indeed there are signs of trouble ahead. The Japanese Earth Simulator was a wake-up call that our leadership is being challenged and that we perhaps had put too many of our eggs in pursuing computer architectures with commercial applications. And we are starting once again to hear concerns from academia that they may not have continuing access to the fastest machines.

This concern is provoked, in part, by the somewhat mixed signals being sent both by NSF and the Department of Energy (DOE) about how they will provide access in the future. I'm also concerned that we not have a situation in which NSF and DOE both run to catch this particular ball and end up with it falling between them.

The antidote to all of this is, in part, to re-invigorate the interagency process we put together in the High-Performance Computing Act of 1991. I want to congratulate Mrs. Biggert and Mr. Davis for introducing a bill that would do just that. We plan to move the bill forward swiftly.

We hope that the revived process and clearer focus called for in the bill will ensure an integrated, adequately funded supercomputing effort among the federal agencies that will help the computing industry develop new machines and will help academic researchers gain access to them.

I hope our distinguished witnesses today will help us figure out how we can accomplish those goals and what else we should be doing, and I hope that Dr. Marburger will be able to assure us that we will be investing the necessary resources in high-performance computing, which now undergirds all of science and engineering.

With that, let me yield the remainder of my time to Mrs. Biggert, the chair of our Energy Subcommittee, to talk about her bill.